

Vanessa Espinoza

Vanessa Espinoza was born in Zacatecas, Mexico. She is the daughter of campesinos. Espinoza immigrated to the United States when she was a toddler. Vanessa grew up in the small town of Conesville, Iowa and attended high school in Columbus Junction, Iowa. As a junior in high school, she started a literacy program for Latinx adults. Upon graduation, Espinoza received the Herbert Hoover Uncommon Student Award and the Mariah Becker Volunteer Leadership Award. She received the distinction of giving a speech in English and Spanish at graduation.



A year after graduating high school, the young leader started the Vanessa Espinoza Scholarship. The scholarship recognizes graduating seniors that have overcome adversity. During her undergraduate experience, Espinoza co-founded the I, too, am UNI campaign with a group of student activists. They worked to address injustices on campus. After seeing racist, sexist, Islamophobic, anti-semitic and homophobic posts online, she worked closely with university administrators to create an inclusive and safe environment for UNI students on campus.

Vanessa collaborated with Dr. Cooley at UNI to create learning, advocacy, and professional support material for people working with immigrants that have survived sexual assault violence in the workforce. Espinoza, a McNair Scholar, and Sigma Delta Pi member was able to graduate with recognition from UNI with the Dean of Students Citation Award, the Outstanding Student Leader Award and a Purple and Old Gold for Meritorious Scholarship in Spanish.

After UNI, Vanessa relocated to Washington, IA where she co-founded Latinos for Washington, IA, Inc. This 501(c)3 nonprofit organization reaches out to the whole community for the betterment of all its citizens, especially Latinos. Additionally, Vanessa worked at Mid-Prairie Community School District in Kalona, Iowa. She taught Spanish and English to speakers of other languages while acting as a cultural liaison for the district's Latinx families.

Currently, Vanessa is a graduate student at Iowa State University. She has been involved with Latinx Student Leader Council in which the team created a 5K race for the first time to raise scholarship money for undocumented students. In addition, she is the ACPA Latinx Midwest Representative, advocates for her cohort members in the School of Education Graduate Student Advisory Council and works with first generation, low income and students with disabilities in the TRIO Student Support Services Program.

At the age of 26, Vanessa Espinoza has launched innovative initiatives, excelled in academics, and charted her professional life, all with a laser-like focus on lifting up Iowa's Latinx community. Vanessa is a keen observer. She sees a problem, confronts the problem, and gathers others to help look for solutions. Vanessa is a doer who will continue to achieve remarkable things for our community, state, and the world.